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# PHANTOM ARMIES SEEN IN FRANCE

BY THE HON. MRS. ST. JOHN MILDMAY

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LITERATURE and history abound with impressive evidence of the intrusion of the phantom world into the affairs of men—a phenomenon which always presents a curious problem. Once again the world is full of rumours, and some of these phenomena seem to be manifesting themselves, to a certain extent, in the present war.

A letter lies before me now in which is related an incident so strange as to excite attention and demand sympathy, although it may be beyond our understanding. It occurred “during the retreat of the 80,000 on that most awful day of that awful time,”—I quote from the graphic description in this letter,—“when ruin and disaster came so near that their shadow fell over London far away, and without any certain news, the hearts of men failed them and grew faint, as if the agony of their brothers on the battlefield had entered into their souls. 300,000 Germans in arms with all their artillery swelled like a flood against the little English Army, and not only was it a time of danger, not merely of defeat, but of utter annihilation.” The courage of our gallant men did not fail when “the German guns thundered and shrieked against that little force of 1,000 or so” who held the crucial position.

“The men joked at the shells and found funny names for them, and had bets about them, and greeted them with music-hall songs,” as they screamed in this terrific cannonade, laying low the flower of the British Army. The climax seemed to have been reached, but “a seven-times heated hell” of the enemy’s onslaught fell upon them, rending brother from brother. “At that very moment,” continues the writer, “they saw from their trenches a tremendous host moving against these lines. Five hundred of the thousand remained,

and as far as they could see the German infantry was pressing on against them, column by column, a grey world of men, 10,000 of them, as it appeared afterwards. There was no hope at all. Some of them shook hands. One man improvised a new version of the battle song *Tipperary*, ending, 'and we shan't get there!' And they all went on firing steadily. The officers pointed out that such an opportunity for fancy shooting might never occur again; the Germans dropped line after line, while the few machine-guns did their best. Everyone knew it was of no use. The dead grey bodies lay in companies and battalions, but others came on and on, swarming and advancing from beyond and beyond.

" 'World without end, Amen,' said one of the British soldiers, with some irrelevance, as he took aim and fired. Then he remembered a vegetarian restaurant in London, where he had once or twice eaten queer dishes of cutlets made of lentils and nuts that pretended to be steaks. On all the plates in this restaurant a figure of St. George was printed in blue with the motto, *Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius*. May St. George be a present help to England! The soldier happened to know Latin and other useless things, so now, as he fired at the grey advancing mass, 300 yards away, he uttered the pious vegetarian motto. He went on firing to the end, till at last Bill on his right had to clout him cheerfully on the head to make him stop, pointing out as he did so that the King's ammunition cost money and was not lightly to be wasted in drilling funny patterns into dead Germans. For as the Latin scholar uttered his invocation he felt something between a shudder and an electric shock pass through his body. The roar of the battle died down in his ears to a gentle murmur, and instead of it, he says, he heard a great voice louder than a thunder peal, crying 'Array! Array!' His heart grew hot as a burning coal, then it grew cold as ice within him, for it seemed to him a tumult of voices answered to this summons. He heard or seemed to hear thousands shouting:

St. George! St. George!

Ha! Messire, Ha! Sweet Saint! grant us good deliverance!

St. George for Merrie England!

Harow! Harow! Monseigneur St. George, succour us, Ha! St. George!  
A long bow, and a strong bow, Knight of Heaven, aid us!

"As the soldier heard these voices, he saw before him, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes with a shining about them. They were like men who drew the bow, and with another shout their cloud of arrows flew singing and whirring through the air toward the German host. The other men in the trenches were firing all the while. They had no hope, but they aimed just as if they had been shooting at Bisley.

"Suddenly one of these lifted up his voice in plain English. 'Gawd help us!' he bellowed to the man next him, 'but we're blooming marvels. Look at those grey gentlemen! Look at them! They're not going down in dozens or hundreds—in *thousands* it is! Look, look! There's a regiment gone while I'm talking to ye!'"

"'Shut it,' the other soldier bellowed, taking aim, 'What are ye talking about?' But he gulped with astonishment even while he spoke, for indeed the grey men were falling by the thousands. The English could hear the guttural scream of their revolvers as they shot, and line after line crashed to the earth. All the while the Latin-bred soldier heard the cry 'Harow! Harow! Monseigneur! Dear Saint. Quick to our aid! St. George help us!'

"The singing arrows darkened the air, the heathen hordes melted before them. 'More machine guns!' Bill yelled to Tom. 'Don't hear them!' Tom yelled back, 'but thank God, anyway, they have got it in the neck.'

"In fact, there were ten thousand dead German soldiers left before that salient of the English army, and consequently—no Sedan. In Germany, a country ruled by scientific principles, the great General Staff decided that the contemptible English must have employed turpenite shells, as no wounds were discernible on the bodies of the dead soldiers. But the man that knew what nuts tasted like when they called themselves steak, knew also that St. George had brought his Agincourt Bowmen to help the English."

And so ends this wonderful description.<sup>1</sup>

It has been frequently remarked that though the enemy has been through the first and even the second lines of the English army, and when complete destruction appeared inevitable, owing to lack of reinforcements, something stayed these attacks. Could it have been that these great wreaths of grey vapour floated to and fro, shaping them-

<sup>1</sup> The battle of Agincourt was fought Oct. 25th, 1415. It would be interesting to discover whether the incident related above happened on that date last year.

selves into mysterious phantom forms, and were visible to the advancing hosts against our soldiers? These, too, may have heard in their ears the rising wild notes of clamour, the fierce shouts of battle, now surging in wild waves of tumultuous melody, then dying away in the battlecry, "St. George! St. George! Grant us deliverance! Knight of Heaven, defend us!" Their eyes may have been unveiled to behold the dazzling light that hovered round the mystic army, and their ears rang to that wondrous call, as the Spirit World was sending forth its sons to fight for their beloved country in the cause of Truth, of Light, and of Hope. In vain did it appear for the war-lords to seek to gather their forces together to drive them through that thin khaki line; a stronger Power was opposed to them, and they were hurled back and held in check by the brightness of those Hosts of Heaven until they sank down in their thousands, as so vividly described in this letter.

There is a curious resemblance between this vision and that revealed to the Maid of Orleans, whose mission to deliver France had been foretold in an ancient prophecy. She heard the voices of the Saints and saw their glorified forms in shining light as she sat alone at Domremy. Imposture and witchcraft, in those days, seemed to be the only explanation of her assumptions, and the English, who had come to believe that their beloved King Henry VI. had led them to a Holy War for the purification of France, were convinced that only Satanic might could withstand them, and turn their courage to timidity. Visions of St. Michael and St. Aignan fighting against them increased their terror, and the Maid led her victorious army into Rheims. A few years separate this mission of La Pucelle from the Battle of Agincourt, and vows to Our Lady and to St. George were made when ford after ford was found impracticable and the army became dispirited.

Their gesture sad,  
Investing lank-lean cloaks and war-worn coats,  
Presenteth them unto the gazing moon  
So many horrid ghosts.

But St. George again answered the call, and Dover watched the homeward sails while it greeted the Royal Standard with shouts of ecstasy.

Once more we hear of psychic phenomena, and in order to

be able to make any reasonable conjecture regarding these spiritual manifestations on the blood-stained territories of Northern France and Belgium, we must look at the subject with an open mind.

It is conceivable that waves of thought are continually flowing from the great centres of the Universe, which are transferred to earth through media of intelligence, but each spirit can transfer only such portions of truth as his development has enabled him to understand, and each mortal can receive only so much knowledge as his intellectual faculties are able to assimilate and comprehend. An explanation of these matters would require a knowledge of the illimitable Universe itself as well as of the nature of that Supreme Being of whom no man can know save in so far as he can grasp the great truth that He is limitless in all senses. Thought is as eternal as life, and as fathomless. Who can say but that the spirits of those killed on the battlefields of old, as well as at the present time, show that they still live, and still think of those they have left, still feel an interest in their struggles, and are as ready to help as when standing side by side in their physical life? It is conceivable, also, that a spirit, at the moment of dissolution, does not lose all the thoughts and desires that have been cultivated in the earthly existence. If the spirit world be created by the thoughts and actions of the soul, every act or thought would therefore form its spiritual material counterpart, and make it possible for events to reproduce themselves.

Modern science tends undoubtedly toward credence in such appearances. Some of our greatest living thinkers, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes, and others, are of the opinion that we are on the verge of vast discoveries, and that the future will reveal secrets that have as yet barely entered the mind of man. The hypothesis has been advanced that at death the fluid ether which holds the material body together, escapes into the surrounding atmosphere, and, according to the temperature, this dispersal of the essence is retarded or accelerated, thus explaining the disintegration of the body. Atoms suitable for materialization may be collected from the atmosphere as well as from the emanations proceeding from man, and shaped by spirit-will into the forms of their earthly bodies. Were the chemists of this world sufficiently advanced in knowledge, they might discover the secret of extracting and retaining this mysterious ether, which, in its

tangible form, has been sought by the sages of all times and all countries. When the world has progressed far enough in its knowledge of chemistry, a greater enlightenment concerning this process may be given to man, just as the understanding of electricity and kindred sciences has been bestowed—discoveries which an earlier age would have termed miraculous, or the result of magic in its worst attributes. Electricity is known to be an active agent in the formation of the shapes of vegetable life. Is it possible that the magnetic, electric currents which flow through space continually act upon cloud-masses of human atoms in the same way, and cause in them the semblance of human beings?

Impressions made upon the eye or mind, and associations with certain events in life, recur at times through messages from an invisible world, which reach us in many ways, and it is, perhaps, through these human faculties that the finite is immersed in complete unity with the infinite.

The picture of St. George upon the plate was visualized in the mind of the soldier at a moment of dire distress when the help of a Higher Power was needed, and possibly the Vision and that great cry infused new strength, and thus brought the soul in closer contact with the eternal reality.

MRS. ST. JOHN MILD MAY.